

Examining the communication skills of student evaluators in higher education accreditation processes: The case of Türkiye

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Abstract: Quality and accreditation are key concepts of our age. In the new world order shaped by the globalization process, the importance given to quality and accreditation at the institutional level is increasing. Higher education institutions are not exempt from this trend. The Turkish Higher Education Quality Council, established in 2015, has increased awareness and consciousness of quality and accreditation in higher education. This study aims to examine the evaluator competencies of student evaluators involved in accreditation processes. As internal stakeholders of higher education institutions, student evaluators play a significant role in quality and accreditation processes in higher education. The effectiveness of evaluation processes depends on the high evaluator competencies of student evaluators. The study, which adopts quantitative research design, was conducted using survey techniques and statistical analysis methods. The sample of the research consists of student evaluators in the evaluator pool of the Turkish Communication Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council (ILEDAK). ILEDAK, a national quality assurance organization, has a key role in communication education and communication accreditation. The study found that student evaluators in the ILEDAK evaluator pool had knowledge and awareness about quality and accreditation. This situation was interpreted as the positive effect of the training they had previously received regarding the evaluation process. The findings obtained within the scope of the study are parallel with the international and national literature and draw attention to the importance of evaluator competencies and communication skills of student evaluators.

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Introduction

With the globalization process, higher education institutions are evolving from a classical structure operating within national boundaries to a new understanding shaped by the influence of multiple actors and requiring strategic management (Marginson 2022; Atalay et al. 2024). Quality and accreditation are the key concepts of this new understanding that shapes higher education institutions. The sustainability of quality and accreditation processes in higher education is directly proportional to the competency levels of the evaluators involved in these processes (Olszak and Sączewska-Piotrowska 2025; Ramezani and Mostafavi 2025). In particular, student evaluators stand out as an important component of the quality assessment ecosystem (Kaynak Altıngüzgün and Coşgun 2020; Gardezi 2024). This study, which aims to examine the competencies of student evaluators, seeks to contribute to quality and accreditation practices in the higher education ecosystem and to guide subsequent studies in the field of higher education research. This study contributes to the limited body of research examining the competencies of student evaluators in higher education quality and accreditation processes through quantitative research methods. It offers original contributions to the literature, particularly in terms of analyzing in detail the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of student evaluators' communication skills and addressing their competencies in accreditation processes.

A quantitative method was used within the framework of the study's purpose. For the survey technique applied within the quantitative research method, the researchers developed a question set related to accreditation and quality and subsequently used the communication skills inventory (Reed et al. 2021). Quantitative research, in its simplest terms, is empirical research in which data is in the form of numbers (Punch 2020). The reason for selecting quantitative research in the study is to make generalizable explanations regarding the evaluation competencies of student evaluators in Türkiye. According to Arıkan (2018), to use the survey technique, the method, purpose, and subject must be suitable for this technique, it must not be directive, there must be a sufficient number of participants, the survey must be designed without errors by experts, observation and

literature review must also be used with this technique, and the obtained information must be suitable for data entry, analysis, and tests.

The success of higher education quality and accreditation processes depends on the qualifications and competencies of the evaluators involved in these processes (Jafarov 2024). Evaluators are the main actors who carry out and manage quality and accreditation evaluation processes in higher education institutions (Serrano et al. 2025). In this context, evaluators provide guidance for the improvement of processes while assessing the compliance of higher education institutions with legislation, quality system requirements, and accreditation criteria (Uludağ et al. 2021).

Kaynak Altıngüzgün and Coşgun (2020), in their study examining student participation in the quality and accreditation processes of educational programs, comparatively analyzed student participation processes at national and international levels. By examining international examples, the researchers classified the roles of student participants in evaluation processes under three main headings: participation in the internal quality processes of the program, serving on evaluation teams of accreditation organizations, and contributing to the preparation of self-evaluation reports. As a result of the research, it was determined that the participation of student evaluators in the processes both strengthened communication with students and made significant contributions to the improvement and development of the quality system by ensuring the accurate evaluation of student feedback. In addition, Atatekin and Dulupçu (2018), in their study examining the evaluation of quality processes in higher education, comparatively analyzed the institutional internal evaluation reports of five state universities from an educational perspective. The researchers conducted an evaluation in terms of the participation of internal and external stakeholders in the process, the performance of faculty members, services for students requiring special approaches, student orientation programs, the richness of learning resources, career development services for students, student satisfaction, and graduate tracking systems, and determined that the participation of student participants in the processes made significant contributions to the improvement and development of the quality system. Uludağ et al. (2021), in their study examining student participation in quality work in higher education, evaluated the views of students who had experienced the quality assurance process in higher education in

Türkiye about quality work. As a result of the research, they determined that students had positive understandings and normative beliefs about quality work, but did not feel competent due to insufficient institutional approach or support. In this direction, it was emphasized that active student participation in the quality assurance processes of higher education institutions in Türkiye should be encouraged. In this direction, the first hypothesis of the study is as follows:

H₁. The communication skills of student evaluators in the ILEDAK evaluator pool differ according to whether or not they have accreditation experience.

The knowledge, experience, communication skills, and analytical thinking abilities that quality evaluators possess in higher education processes directly affect the success of quality and accreditation evaluations. The quality and accreditation processes of higher education institutions require special expertise and equipment (Duarte and Vardasca 2023). Evaluators in higher education must have knowledge about higher education legislation and system, as well as academia, quality, and accreditation, and must possess the characteristics that a quality evaluator should have (Ryan 2015). Harvey and Green (1993), in their study defining and evaluating the concept of quality in higher education, addressed quality as continuous improvement efforts in the fields of teaching-learning and research-development. As a result of the study, it was determined that ensuring and sustaining quality in higher education institutions and processes is a fundamental requirement for the development of individuals and societies and their ability to exist in the world of the future. Ulker (2021), in a comparative study examining the effect of student evaluations on teaching quality in higher education institutions in Türkiye and America, determined that faculty members needed training in interpreting evaluation results, and that the lack of this training negatively affected the effectiveness of evaluation processes. Schomaker (2015), in research examining accreditation processes in the Egyptian higher education system, analyzed the factors affecting the efficiency of quality assurance systems. As a result of the study, it was determined that evaluators needed to be supported by training programs and their competencies needed to be continuously developed for the success of quality assurance processes. In this direction, the second hypothesis of the study is as follows:

H₂. The communication skills of student evaluators in the ILEDAK evaluator pool differ according to whether or not they have received training on accreditation.

The effective implementation of quality assurance and accreditation processes in higher education is possible through the development and documentation of evaluators' competencies (Almusallam 2013). Supporting evaluators involved in quality evaluation processes, especially through training and certification is of critical importance for the reliability of the process (Ayvaz et al. 2016). Özçiçek and Karaca (2019), in their study examining quality assurance and accreditation processes in higher education institutions, revealed that accreditation is the process of approval by an authorized organization of the quality that institutions and organizations are trying to provide and its examination at certain intervals. As a result of the study, it was determined that certification played a key role in demonstrating that higher education institutions met quality standards and in gaining international recognition. Furthermore, Ryan (2015), in a literature review, stated that the training received by evaluators is an important part of accreditation for the success of quality assurance systems. In this context, the third hypothesis of the study is as follows:

H₃. The communication skills of student evaluators in the ILEDAK evaluator pool differ according to whether or not they hold a training certificate or certification related to accreditation.

Methodology

In this study, which employed a quantitative research method, the research population consisted of all student evaluators in the ILEDAK student evaluator pool. As of 2024, there were 95 student evaluators in the ILEDAK evaluator pool. In this context, a total of 95 evaluators from undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels who earned the right to become student evaluators by participating in ILEDAK's Student Evaluator Workshop constituted the research population. The principle of voluntariness was adopted for the general data collection approach, and the study was conducted on the entire research population. Evaluators who met the conditions of being willing to participate, being an ILEDAK student evaluator, and having ongoing student status were included in the study.

Due to the small population size and the feasibility of reaching the entire population, the entire population was invited to the study without any sampling, and responses were obtained from volunteer

evaluators. In this context, a total of 58 responses were received from the population of 95, representing 61.05% of the population.

The data collection process of the study was conducted within the scope of January 2024 - June 2024, in parallel with the research calendar. Data were collected by reaching participants through Google Forms.

General Information Form: It contains 12 questions regarding the accreditation process, along with questions inquiring about participants' personal information and their experience and training related to accreditation. The general information form was developed by the researchers for this study.

Communication Skills Inventory: In the study, participants' general communication skill levels were determined by the total score obtained from the communication skills inventory developed by Ersanlı and Balcı (1998). The inventory, which has three sub-dimensions (mental communication skills, emotional communication skills, and behavioural communication skills), is of 5-point Likerttype. The score that can be obtained within the scope of the communication skills inventory ranges from 45-225; the score that can be obtained from each sub-dimension ranges from 15-75. The questions of the sub-dimensions were presented in groups:

- Mental Communication Skills: 1, 3, 6, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, 24, 28, 30, 33, 37, 43, 45
- Emotional Communication Skills: 5, 9, 11, 26, 27, 29, 31, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 44
- Behavioral Communication Skills: 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 32, 41

When scoring the scale, some questions are scored directly, while others are scored inversely. The scoring of questions is as follows:

- Directly Scored Questions: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45
- Inversely Scored Questions: 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 16, 23, 24, 27, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 41

A high score on both the total Communication Skills Inventory score and the scores obtained from the sub-dimensions indicates high communication skills. Additionally, the sub-dimension with the highest score among the sub-dimension scores indicates the area in which the individual is better. In the study in which the Communication Skills Inventory was developed and validity and reliability analyses were conducted, the Cronbach's Alpha values for

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the inventory and its sub-dimensions were as follows (Ersanlı and Balcı 1998):

- Communication Skills Inventory Total Score Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient: 0.72
- Mental Communication Skills Cronbach's Alpha Value: 0.83
- Behavioral Communication Skills Cronbach's Alpha Value: 0.82
- Emotional Communication Skills Cronbach's Alpha Value: 0.73

IBM's SPSS software version 24.0 was used for data analysis. Kurtosis and skewness values were examined to assess normality, and values between -1.5 and +1.5 were accepted as normally distributed (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013). Descriptive statistics were utilized in the analysis of general characteristics. T-Test was applied to examine the differences between participants' general characteristics and the Communication Skills Inventory total score, as well as the scores of the inventory's sub-dimensions—mental communication skills, emotional communication skills, and behavioural communication skills. Findings were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval and 5% significance level. The comparison of some independent variables with the Communication Skills Inventory and the scores obtained from the inventory's sub-dimensions was presented with graphs prepared in the same SPSS program.

Ethics committee approval of the research

The research has an ethics committee approval document with protocol number 2335, pursuant to decision number 02/19 dated 28/02/2024 of Ege University Social Sciences and Humanities, Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee.

Findings

The general characteristics of the student evaluators who voluntarily participated in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. General characteristics of the participants

		n	%
Gender	Female	31	53.4
	Male	27	46.6
	Total	58	100.0
Age	18-20	1	1.7
	21-23	14	24.1

	24-26	6	10.3
	27-30	21	36.2
	31+	16	27.6
	Total	58	100.0
Education	Undergraduate	18	31.0
	Graduate	40	69.0
	Total	58	100.0
Experience in assessment-evaluation, continuous improvement, or accreditation preparation (accreditation coordinator, stakeholder, etc.) in domestic and /or international accredited communication programs	Yes	39	67.2
	No	19	32.8
	Total	58	100.0
Experience in quality processes related to communication education accreditation in general	Yes	41	70.7
	No	17	29.3
	Total	58	100.0
Having received any training (seminar, workshop, course, etc.) related to accreditation, quality management system, quality assurance, continuous improvement process management	Yes	48	82.8
	No	10	17.2
	Total	58	100.0

Of the participants, 53.4% (n=31) are female and 46.6% (n=27) are male, with the majority (69.0%) consisting of graduate students. 67.2% of the participants (n=39) have experience in assessment-evaluation, continuous improvement, or accreditation preparation (accreditation coordinator, stakeholder, etc.) in domestic and/or international accredited communication programs, while 70.7% have experience in quality processes related to communication education accreditation in general. Additionally, 82.8% have received training (seminar, workshop, course, etc.) related to accreditation, quality management system, quality assurance, and continuous improvement process management.

The views of the student evaluators participating in the study regarding program evaluation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' views on program evaluation

		n	%
Which is correct for program evaluation processes?	The primary purpose of program research is to develop a new knowledge base or expand an existing knowledge base	4	6.9
	The primary purpose of program evaluation is to provide information related to specific program improvement or	19	32.8

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	program management decisions		
	Both are correct	33	56.9
	Both are incorrect	2	3.4
	Total	58	100.0
The concept that best describes program evaluation activities	Recommendation	3	5.2
	Inspection	1	1.7
	Guidance	5	8.6
	Supervision	9	15.5
	Certification	3	5.2
	Measurement	9	15.5
	Compliance with criteria	24	41.4
	Professional competence determination	3	5.2
	Research capacity	1	1.7
	Total	58	100.0
The primary task of the evaluator	To take part in the execution of program evaluation activities	46	79.3
	To determine whether the program complies with the criteria and apply sanctions	8	13.8
	To learn what they are curious about the program	2	3.4
	To rank programs by grading them	2	3.4
	Total	58	100.0
Knowledge, skills, and experience that an evaluator should have (Multiple options could be selected)	Quality and accreditation knowledge and experience	52	89.7
	Communication skills	54	93.1
	Interpersonal skills	38	65.5
	Analytical thinking skills	41	70.7
	Problem-solving skills	36	62.1
	Expression and questioning skills	48	82.8
	Time management skills	40	69.0
	Stress management skills	27	46.6
	Teamwork skills	53	91.4
	Ability to take responsibility	42	72.4
	Ethical conduct skills	52	89.7

56.9% of the participants (n=33) reported that both statements, “the primary purpose of program research is to develop a new knowledge base or expand an existing knowledge base” and “the primary purpose of program evaluation is to provide information related to specific program improvement or program management decisions,” are correct. It was determined that 41.4% of the participants (n=24) selected “compliance with criteria” as the concept that best describes program evaluation activities. The least selected concepts were “inspection” at 1.7% (n=1) and “research capacity” at 1.7% (n=1). The selection rates

of other concepts are presented in Table 2. The primary task of the evaluator was selected at a rate of 79.3% (n=46) as “to take part in the execution of program evaluation activities.” In the question asking about the knowledge, skills, and experience that an evaluator should have, multiple options could be selected. The most frequently selected characteristics in this question were “communication skills” at 93.1% (n=54), “team work skills” at 91.4% (n=53), “quality and accreditation knowledge and experience” at 89.7% (n=52), and “ethical conduct skills” at 89.7% (n=52), respectively. The least selected characteristic was “stress management skills” with a rate of 46.6% (n=27). The rates for other characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 3. Distribution of total score and sub-dimension means of the Communication Skills Inventory

	$\bar{X}$	SS
Communication Skills Inventory Total Score	168.05	12.282
Mental Communication Skills	58.52	4.899
Emotional Communication Skills	54.36	5.444
Behavioral Communication Skills	55.17	3.844

In the present study, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the Communication Skills Inventory total score was calculated as 0.827. The average total score obtained by the participants from the Communication Skills Inventory is 168.05 ± 12.282 . When the sub-dimensions of the inventory are considered, the mental communication skill score was found to be 58.52 ± 4.899 , the emotional communication skills score 54.36 ± 5.444 , and the behavioral communication skills score 55.17 ± 3.844 . The highest mean score obtained by the participants from the sub-dimensions of the inventory is mental communication skills.

Table 4. Distribution of areas where participants' communication skills are high according to Communication Skills Inventory sub-dimensions

Sub-dimension with the Highest Score	n	%
Mental Communication Skills	44	75.86
Emotional Communication Skills	4	6.90
Behavioral Communication Skills	7	12.07
Mental and Behavioral Communication Skills Scores Equal	2	3.45
Mental and Emotional Communication Skills Scores Equal	1	1.72

According to the Communication Skills Inventory sub-dimensions, 75.86% of the participants (n=44) have high mental communication skills, 12.07% (n=7) have high behavioural communication skills, and

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6.90% (n=4) have high emotional communication skills. 3.45% (n=2) had equal Mental and Behavioral Communication Skills scores, and 1.72% had equal Mental and Emotional Communication Skills scores.

Table 5. Comparison of Communication Skills Inventory Total Score and Sub-dimension Means According to Variables

		Communication Skills Total Score		Mental Communication Skills		Emotional Communication Skills		Behavioral Communication Skills	
		$\bar{X} \pm SD$	p	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	p	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	p	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	p
Gender	Female (n=31)	171.83±1 1.919	0.01 1*	59.70±4. 748	0.04 6*	55.70±5 .866	0.04 2*	56.41±3. 354	0.00 7*
	Male (n=27)	163.70±1 1.404		57.14±4. 793		52.81±4 .540		53.74±3. 928	
Education	Undergraduate (n=18)	170.94±1 3.644	0.23 2	60.00±5. 594	0.12 3	54.61±6 .436	0.81 8	56.33±3. 940	0.12 4
	Graduate (n=40)	166.75±1 1.564		57.85±4. 469		54.25±5 .021		54.65±3. 731	
Accreditation Experience	Yes (n=39)	167.53±1 2.953	0.65 2	58.41±5. 255	0.81 4	54.25±4 .897	0.83 4	54.87±4. 105	0.39 8
	No (n=19)	169.10±1 1.034		58.73±4. 201		54.57±6 .568		55.78±3. 258	
Communication education accreditation experience	Yes (n=41)	168.17±1 2.012	0.91 0	58.68±4. 844	0.69 3	54.53±4 .759	0.70 8	54.95±3. 827	0.50 1
	No (n=17)	167.76±1 3.287		58.11±5. 158		53.94±6 .977		55.70±3. 949	
Having received training on accreditation	Yes (n=51)	168.80±1 2.369	0.21 1	58.49±4. 742	0.91 1	55.03±5 .075	0.00 9*	55.27±3. 975	0.59 0
	No (n=7)	162.57±1 0.875		58.71±6. 369		49.42±5 .883		54.4±22. 820	
Training certificate/certification related to accreditation	Yes (n=48)	169.20±1 2.012	0.11 7	58.77±4. 736	0.39 3	55.00±4 .881	0.05	55.43±3. 880	0.25 5
	No (n=10)	162.50±1 2.668		57.30±5. 735		51.30±7 .118		53.90±3. 573	

*p<0.05; t-test

The comparison of the Communication Skills Inventory total score and sub-dimension means according to variables is presented in Table 5. The Communication Skills total score and scores obtained from all sub-dimensions differ according to gender. Female participants' Communication Skills Inventory total score, mental communication skills score, emotional communication skills score, and behavioral communication skills score are higher than those of males (p<0.05).

The emotional communication skills score of participants who reported having received training on accreditation is statistically significantly higher than those who did not receive training. Accordingly, H₂ was confirmed. No statistically significant relationship was found between other variables and the total score and sub-

dimension scores of the inventory. Accordingly, H_1 and H_3 hypotheses were rejected.

Conclusion

The concept of quality has become a fundamental element that ensures the sustainable success of higher education institutions and their ability to maintain a presence in the global competitive environment. Enhancing the quality of education and training, research and development, and social contribution processes strengthens the contribution of higher education institutions to the future of both individuals and societies. Quality and accreditation in higher education emerge as a necessity for raising educated and well-equipped generations, adapting to the future, and maintaining existence in the global world.

Accreditation is a comprehensive quality management mechanism used to evaluate and ensure the compliance of higher education institutions with specific standards. Accreditation promotes not only compliance with existing standards but also an approach focused on continuous development and improvement. This process enables the dissemination of a quality assurance culture in higher education and allows higher education institutions to gain credibility, recognition, and reputation at national and international levels.

The role of evaluators in quality assessment and accreditation processes stands out as a factor that directly affects the success of the process. In particular, student evaluators make significant contributions not only as recipients and users of these processes but also as active actors. Students support quality processes within the institution as internal stakeholders and participate in quality assessment processes as evaluators, ensuring the inclusion of the student perspective in these processes.

For students to succeed as quality evaluators, they must possess not only knowledge and experience in quality and accreditation processes but also competencies such as effective communication skills, analytical thinking, focus group interviewing, problem-solving, and stress management. These competencies are noteworthy as elements that enhance the effectiveness of the process at both individual and institutional levels.

This research aimed to examine the competencies of student evaluators in quality and accreditation processes in higher education. The results of the research reveal important findings regarding the role

and competencies of student evaluators in quality and accreditation processes in higher education. The study, conducted with 58 participants from a population of 95 student evaluators in the ILEDAK evaluator pool, was designed using a mixed research method.

The demographic findings of the research indicate that 53.4% of the participants were female and 46.6% were male, with the vast majority (69%) consisting of graduate students. As a striking finding, the fact that 82.8% of the participants had received training in accreditation and quality management reveals the qualification of the evaluator pool.

Findings related to program evaluation activities reveal that 56.9% of the participants view program evaluation both as a tool for developing a new knowledge base and for providing information for program improvement decisions. In terms of evaluator competencies, the most prominent characteristics were determined to be communication skills, teamwork skills, knowledge of quality and accreditation, and ethical conduct skills, respectively.

A noteworthy finding regarding the competencies of student evaluators is that 70.7% of the participants have experience in the field of quality processes related to communication education accreditation. This experience is considered an important indicator of the effectiveness of evaluation processes.

The results of the communication skills inventory showed that participants' mental communication skills ($\bar{X}=58.52$) were higher compared to other sub-dimensions. The fact that 75.86% of the participants were more successful in mental communication skills indicates that their analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities are strong. The fact that 56.9% of the participants view program evaluation as a process both for developing a new knowledge base and for program improvement decisions supports this holistic perception.

In conclusion, it has been observed that the effective implementation of quality assurance and accreditation processes in higher education is possible through the development of evaluators' competencies and the enhancement of student participation. It is clear that these processes are of indispensable importance both in ensuring the sustainability of higher education institutions and accreditation organizations and in contributing to the future of individuals and societies. Based on the research results, it is recommended that future studies comparatively examine the competencies of student evaluators in different accreditation organizations. Furthermore, priority should be given to strengthening emotional and behavioral communication skills, in

addition to mental communication skills, in the training of student evaluators.

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